

Testimony In Support Of Raised Bill 6616, An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health
Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status

Rosa Gonzalez Juarez, BS
Joint Committee on Human Services
February 14, 2023

SUBJECT: H.B. No. 6616 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY
HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS

Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, Senator Seminara, Representative Case, and other
Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Rosa Gonzalez Juarez, and I am from New Haven. I am also a 2023 Candidate for the Master of Public Health at the Yale School of Public Health with 10 years of experience working and advocating with the immigrant community and a child of Mexican immigrant parents.

I stand in strong support of Raised Bill HB 6616: “AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS.” Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is a key step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving, and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that *everyone* has access to health coverage.

Having worked with domestic workers, day laborers and farm workers, I often bore witness to the more-hidden costs and community health consequences these workers experienced: the long hours, calloused hands, uncontrolled diabetes and hypertension, substance use disorders, unrelenting stress, and the mental illness left untreated from erroneous stigma in Latino communities, to name a few. Due to the nature of their work, they are unable to seek or access affordable healthcare, as they have been excluded from many of the nation's Health and Safety Labor Acts.¹ They are also unable to apply for unemployment insurance and receive stable monthly income and are very unlikely to have employment-based health insurance.

Every day, they must decide between being able to afford their medication to be able to control their chronic disease to be able to continue working or paying rent to keep a roof over their head. Having to witness my community make these decisions daily, and now being a public health student, I have come to understand these were part of the Social Determinants of Health (SOH). The United States Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion describes Social Determinants of Health as “the conditions in the

¹ Rao P, Girosi F, Eibner C. Expanding Insurance Coverage to Undocumented Immigrants in Connecticut. Rand Health Q. 2022 Nov 14;10(1):3. Page 1. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1964-1.html

environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks”.²

Having worked as a Community Health Worker, I provided free high blood pressure screenings to the community. More than once, we would see someone who had high blood pressure and we would have to educate them on the importance of securing medical care with a provider. I would then find out they had stopped taking their medication or stopped seeing their provider because they could not afford to keep paying for their medication or their visit. They knew they had to control their blood pressure, but not having health insurance stopped them from seeing their provider and would oftentimes end up in the Emergency Room.

Having access to health insurance means families have access to healthcare and can improve their health outcomes, control their chronic diseases, and contribute financially to the state's economy. According to a 2022 Research Report by the RAND Corporation (funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), “Medicaid expansions have been found to significantly reduce the number of unpaid bills and the amount of debt sent to collection agencies”.³ Investing in healthcare for immigrant communities is an investment in the future of Connecticut and will reduce healthcare costs in the long run.

I support HB 6616: “AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS” and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age. If you have any further questions, or concerns, feel free to contact me at rosa.gonzalezjuarez@yale.edu.

Thank you for your time,
Rosa Gonzalez Juarez, BS

² “Social Determinants of Health - Healthy People 2030 | Health.Gov,” accessed February 13, 2023, <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>.

³ Rao P, Girosi F, Eibner C. Expanding Insurance Coverage to Undocumented Immigrants in Connecticut. Rand Health Q. 2022 Nov 14;10(1):3. Page 4. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1964-1.html